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“Ensuring Homeland Security While Facilitating
Legitimate Travel: The Challenge at America’s Ports
of Entry”
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Good Morning and welcome to El Paso! My name is Bob Cook and I am the President and CEO of the El Paso Regional Economic Development Corporation (REDCo)—an organization whose mission is to recruit new industry to the El Paso area, an area that includes El Paso, Texas, Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua and Las Cruces, New Mexico.

First of all I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address you today. I consider it a great privilege and responsibility to appear before you and provide testimony about the transcendent need to deploy improved methods and technologies to secure America's Borders, while at the same time improving the flow of legitimate cargo and people across the U.S./Mexico border. The people of El Paso understand the need for enhanced national security, but we are acutely aware of the fact that economic security is threatened with less efficient ports of entry—which we believe leads to lessened national security. Because of our longstanding relationship with Mexico, there are many in the public and private sectors of El Paso/Juarez who can provide expert advice as to how our nation can effectively address such matters—because we deal with these issues on a daily basis.

As a resident of the El Paso/ Juarez area, one of the largest bi-cultural border communities in the world, I have many close friends and business associates on both sides of the international border. I want to be very clear with two messages today.... First, three hour wait times which have become common at our international ports of entry do not equate to greater national security. Secondly, the building of a wall along the southwest border is both an insult to our neighbors and allies in Mexico and truly un-American in nature. We in the business community feel that we have an open line of communication with our port managers, but we believe that they are hampered by a flawed system. The clear flaw of the system now in place is that there is little distinction made in the approach to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate people and cargo. My point is that we should be seeking to aggressively expand the use of technologies and procedures that identify and expedite low-risk traffic, in order that we may spend the majority of our time and financial resources on the potentially high risk individuals and cargo carriers.

El Paso and Ciudad Juarez are mutually dependant on each other for their economic well being. Improvements must be made to reduce wait times on the bridge especially in light of the fact that American citizens will soon be required to show a passport as they travel back from Mexico. Because of our longstanding relationship with Mexico, the people of El Paso understand the need for enhanced security, but we are also very aware of the fact that decreases in border-crossing efficiency lead to economic insecurity. In fact, we firmly believe that the efficient cross-border transport of legitimate cargo is a vital component of the well being of the economy of the city of El Paso, the state of Texas, and the nation as a whole. In 2006 there was approximately \$50 billion worth of trade that passed through El Paso's ports of entry, or roughly 15.2% of the total trade between the U.S. and Mexico. Another \$154.3 billion in goods (61.7% of all US-Mexico Trade) crossed through other Texas ports, and a total of \$54.8 billion in

exports (40 percent of US exports to Mexico) originate in Texas. Increases in bridge times can lead to reduction in this trade, placing some portion of this economic engine at risk.

A recent study by Dr. Michael Patrick, Director for the Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development at Texas A&M University concluded that a 1% decline in crossings would cost the El Paso border region \$76 million in retail sales and 1,500 jobs. This would equate to an estimated decrease in Gross State Product by \$1.2 billion. If these findings are correct, imagine what we could accomplish economically with a 2% or 3% improvement in border crossings.

Allow me please to bring this down to impacts at the local level....

El Paso retailers depend upon Mexican consumers for their livelihood. Mexican nationals roughly \$1.5 dollars in El Paso retail stores each year, roughly one fifth of El Paso's \$8 billion retail economy. Each time the Department of Homeland Security issues an elevated level of threat awareness, or any other issue that causes an increase in bridge crossing times and a resulting decrease in crossings of legitimate persons, the impact is immediately felt at the cash register in El Paso.

Approximately 50,000 El Pasoans derive their livelihood, either directly or indirectly, from the maquiladora industry in Mexico. In the City of Juarez, there are almost 350 maquila operations, approximately 85% of which are owned and operated by by US corporations. Approximately 3,100 people live in El Paso and cross the international border each day to work as a plant manger, engineer, or other professional occupation in these operations. Additionally, there are an estimated 5,500 persons who are direct employees and another estimated 14,000 number work in a wide range of support industries including plastics processing, metals processing, packaging, financial institutions, and more. There is 30,000 jobs in the El Paso area that are indirect spin offs of the maquiladora industry in Ciudad Juarez

The sheer volume of cross-border traffic clearly presents a monumental challenge to those agents who are at the ports of entry, working on the front-line of providing for the security of the homeland. Border crossing figures demonstrate that average daily border crossings include 42,648 private vehicles, 2,122 commercial trucks and 20,547 pedestrians-- all traveling northbound from Mexico through El Paso area ports of entry. The numbers suggest that we must find more effective technologies and procedures to move these volumes on a daily basis.

I do not claim to be an expert on the matter, but I am aware of technologies which can have a impact on the easing of bridge crossing times for both civilian and commercial traffic. By utilizing prescreening processes such as those deployed in the Dedicated Cargo Lanes and FAST Lanes, combined with technologies such as SENTRI and NEXUS, along with non-invasive scanning processes such as PFNA and Back Scatter X-ray-- bridge crossing times can be reduced, while at the same time ensuring a greater degree of security.

While I understand that you are primarily interested in hearing about the impact of bridge crossing times, I am still compelled to comment on the human side of the national security issue. We are confronted with the prospect of having a fence being built along the border. As I said earlier, the proposed fence of separation is an insult to our neighbors in Mexico and we should

not treat friends and neighbors in such a way—especially a neighbor that has been a dedicated and substantial trading partner. The message that a 370 mile fence along our shared border sends is not one of goodwill and appreciation, instead it is one of protectionism, separation and alienation. We would suggest that rather than building a physical wall, Congress should consider investing those funds in building better surveillance and intelligence technologies, “smart bridges”, and other approaches that can help enhance national security by enabling agents to inspect a greater amount of cargo and vehicles in a smaller amount of time. Implementation of such a strategy will spur sustainable economic growth of border communities which will positively impact federal revenues. This will in turn lead to enhanced security along the border – an approach to security that will be effective instead of offensive.

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